

Transformation Journal

June 12 – August 6

**THIS JOURNAL
BELONGS TO:**

ABOUT THIS JOURNAL

We're so honored that you're starting on this transformation journey with us! It's our wholehearted belief that the daily discipline of time in the Word and with God is a key element to building our spiritual muscles and help us become strong disciples. We believe and have seen it lived out that the daily discipline of devotion to God can help people become more fully who God created them to be.

With that in mind, we hope that each and every one who picks up this journal will be challenged and encouraged.

the setup

SUNDAY: There's space for those that would like to take notes during the message. (Don't forget to bring your journal along with you to worship!)

MONDAY – FRIDAY: There's a daily scripture reading, space to write out your thoughts and a short devotional to encourage and motivate you throughout your week.

SATURDAY: There's a challenge for you to try out or complete. Some may be easy for you and others may be more demanding, but you've got this!

Remember to pray before you begin and ask God to bless you with insight and discernment as you reflect and respond.

Journeying with you,
The Adult Discipleship Team

**COME
HOLY
SPIRIT**

COME
HOLY
SPIRIT

READ: Acts 1

NOTES: _____

NEXT STEPS: _____

reflection

In Acts 1 we find that the disciples have been with Jesus after his resurrection for 40 days. How precious those 40 days must have been! Don't you get goosebumps thinking about being there? I imagine those days were full of Jesus readying his beloved disciples to spread his words "to the ends of the earth" – to witness what Jesus is and can do. Before Jesus left them he told the disciples to wait, to not start their discipleship journey until they received his gift of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the next best thing to having Jesus Christ with them, giving them strength, courage, boldness, confidence, insight, ability and even authority! Just like the disciples, we too must wait on God and his gift of the Holy Spirit! How do we wait? We wait by spending time with God. By reading his word and talking with God, you'll recognize when the Holy Spirit is calling you to action! We need God's timing, guidance, and power to be truly effective. With the Holy Spirit you can produce extraordinary works for God and his people....to the ends of the earth.

Do you run ahead of God's plans?

What can you do to help yourself to wait, hear and feel God's gift of the Holy Spirit?

–Carolyn Pierce

READ: Acts 2

NOTES: _____

NEXT STEPS: _____

reflection

Imagine a community where the residents truly live life with their neighbors. They enjoy cookouts together, play games, workout together, and seek one another for advice. They celebrate together and mourn together. If someone needs a sitter, their neighbors have their back. They worship together and serve together. In this community they share everything so no one lacks anything. Who wouldn't want to be a part of this community? This looks a lot like the early church that we see here in Acts 2. There is no wonder why this community grew daily. Life groups are meant to model this Acts 2 community, where we truly live life with one another.

Who are you doing life with? If you don't have a community of people that you do life with, I want to invite you to join a life group. Check out ginghamsburg.org/lifegroups to view open life group opportunities. I want to encourage you to pray and be open to inviting others to be a part of your community.

-*Marcy Walker*

READ: Acts 3

NOTES: _____

NEXT STEPS: _____

reflection

My brother was born with Usher Syndrome. Deaf at birth, blind by adulthood. It should be of no surprise how curious we were when we stumbled into a healing service at a church down the road from our parent's house. We sat in the back as Preacher warmed the crowd. Two rows in front of us sat a man with a giant cast on his arm. Preacher spotted him, called him forward and told him to take off his cast. My brother and I always wondered why a physical healing wasn't available to him that day. The man with the cast was already on his way toward healing. He had obviously seen a medical professional, had his injury treated and just needed to work through his recovery plan. But Preacher threw the man's cast aside and said, "in the name of Jesus you are healed." The man's forehead was sweating and his face was red, but he raised his hands over his head in praise. Was the man's arm healed? Maybe. But my brother and I have since learned that healing is multifaceted. Acts 3 reminds me of my brother's favorite verse: John 9:3. Just like Peter and John's encounter with the paralyzed man, Jesus' encounter with the man born blind reveals that healing, no matter the kind, can reveal a bigger purpose.

Scan the QR code to watch my brother's testimony.

-Dan Bracken



READ: Acts 4:1-31

NOTES: _____

NEXT STEPS: _____

reflection

Peter and John were walking to the Temple's 3pm prayer meeting. But when Peter healed a lame man along the way, it changed the whole course of the evening, turning it into a discussion (verbal fight) about the good and bad aspects of healing the infirm. That resulted in a night in jail and 5,000 new followers of Jesus. Look at some of the comments that were made by the people, both Christians and religious leaders: "By what power, or in whose name, have you done this?" "He was healed by the powerful name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene." "God has given no other name under heaven but Jesus by which we must be saved." The religious leaders commanded the disciples never again to speak or teach in the name of Jesus. I think there was a time when a person's name and character meant something. I slightly remember when parents were embarrassed by their disrespectful child. Call me silly, but I think Satan would be very pleased if he saw people of all ages using a language that only uses words that injure others and the user.

In your opinion, why does Jesus get crude verbal comments about him? Ask a coworker, a parent, sibling, or any other person why Jesus' name is used as a cuss word.

When you ask people the two questions above, why do they get mad at you?

-David Phipps

READ: Acts 4:32-37

NOTES: _____

NEXT STEPS: _____

reflection

In Acts 4, the power of God's Holy Spirit unified the new believers in Jesus; as an expression of their love for God and for one another, they expressed true love and community. Caring for one another as this new movement began was the initial, beautiful outpouring of their new birth in Christ. In his letter to the young church, James writes, "Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him or her, 'Go: I wish you well. Be warm and well-fed,' yet does nothing about his or her physical needs, what good is it?" (James 2:15-16). His words reveal the truth of our new life in Christ: real faith results in real love -- for God, for others, and for our world. Empty words are easy: the true test is in our actions. While our actions will never save us (only faith in Christ can do that), real faith in him will always produce actions of love for and blessing to others.

Have you surrendered your life to Jesus, asking him to be both Lord and Savior of your life?

If you said yes, has Jesus transformed you from the inside-out? Do you see real evidence of loving God and loving others in your life? If you aren't seeing evidence, why? Are you letting Jesus be Lord of your life, or are you keeping control of certain areas?

-Erica Baer

CHALLENGE: CELEBRATE JUNETEENTH

“Juneteenth” is short for “June Nineteenth.” It marks the day when federal troops arrived in Galveston, Texas in 1865 to take control of the state and ensure that all enslaved people were freed. The troops’ arrival came a full two and a half years after the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation. Juneteenth honors the end of slavery in the United States. On June 17, 2021, it officially became a federal holiday.

How should I celebrate Juneteenth?

1. Learn the full history

June 19, 1865, marks Juneteenth, however the end of slavery was not so clear-cut. Educate yourself about the full history of Juneteenth and the events leading up to it. The Smithsonian’s National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, D.C., has several digital resources including musical performances, lectures, recipes and a guide to researching ancestors.

2. Educate and Advocate

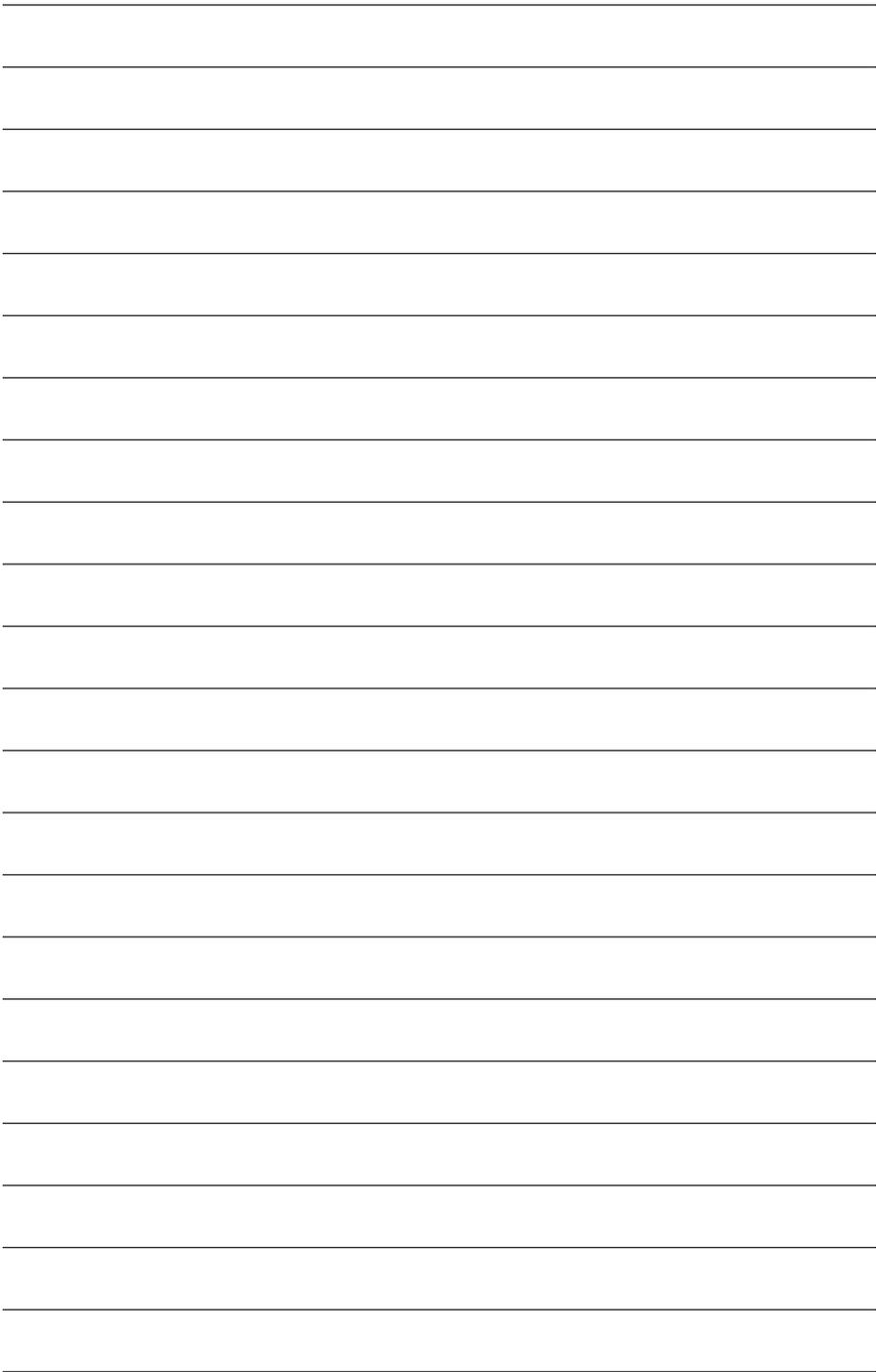
Share what you learn from your own research. Take your kids to the library and borrow some children’s books about Juneteenth. Use your sphere of influence to advocate for recognition of Juneteenth — for example, if your workplace or school does not have the holiday off, question why.

3. Celebrate!

Don’t just take the day off. Attend a parade, local event or host a barbecue. Red is the color associated with the holiday, as it symbolizes sacrifice and transition. Celebrations typically include red foods like red velvet cake, red beverages, watermelon and barbecued meats.

–Shannon Flora

notes



READ: Acts 5:1-11

NOTES: _____

NEXT STEPS: _____

reflection

Well. What do I do with this? That question has been stuck in my head since the moment I read this passage. The believers have been pooling their resources and freely sharing what they have. Along come Ananias and Sapphira. They knowingly withhold proceeds from a sale and BOOM. They die. Right in front of Peter. He calls them out before they die, but how does he know? Was it divine? Was it gossip? Both? What's running through his head as the events unfold before him?? The questions pour out of my head as I read the passage. I think the biggest question though is this: Who is this lesson for? Ananias and Sapphira are dead. The story is over for them.

What stays with you as you read this passage?

What lessons emerge for you?

-Shannon Sellars

READ: Acts 5:12-16

NOTES: _____

NEXT STEPS: _____

reflection

Imagine you hear about a nearby church. You know several of the people who attend there, and you think well of each of them. They've never given you reason to suspect them of trickery or deception. But crazy stories are coming out of that place. People are flocking there in droves. Is it possible that just by being in the vicinity people have been healed of cancer, addiction, infertility? That's what people are saying. Can it be so? You want to check it out but you aren't sure what you're getting into. Your mom's dementia has been advancing. Wouldn't it be wonderful to see her focused and laughing again?

What if that place was Ginghamburg Church? After all, we have access to the same Holy Spirit that Peter and the apostles relied upon. What if, when your shadow passed over someone, they were restored to wholeness?

Lord Jesus, send your Spirit and use us, your believers, to restore those around us to health. Help us to believe, Lord. Amen.

-Kate Johnsen

READ: Acts 5:17-42

NOTES: _____

NEXT STEPS: _____

reflection

The Pharisees and Sadducees were in a precarious position in Jesus' day. They were entrusted with upholding God's law, but also had inherited added tradition that placed burdens on the people God never intended. To be part of the religious leadership was part holy work, part human invention. Layered on top of that was Roman occupation. It was clear that keeping things quiet on the religious front in order to avoid political violence was key. The apostles were making too much noise. Miraculous healings, crowds of people gathering for teaching and preaching, and claims that Jesus was the Messiah now risen from the dead threatened to throw things into the unknown. People in power would lose power. People on the margins would gain power. Authority would be questioned. The fragile peace would be over. So the high priest doubled down on stopping the apostles. And the apostles doubled down on their activity. It was Gamaliel, a Pharisee, who became the voice of true peace by offering this simple wisdom: If the apostles' mission and message is not from God, it will die out on its own. If the mission and message is from God, it will live on, and in that case, do you really want to oppose God? Either way, there is no need to take action. Let things take their course. Time will tell.

Take a moment to pray for wise people to rise up into peace-making positions.

-Laura Griffin

READ: Acts 6:1-7

NOTES: _____

NEXT STEPS: _____

reflection

Administrative problems in today's churches are not unique. Even in its earliest days, the church had these issues. The early church was growing fast enough that the 12 disciples were drowning with all the important work. With great wisdom, the disciples began delegating tasks. This allowed them to stay in their lanes of giftedness - preaching, teaching and prayer. It also gave the opportunity for seven others to shine by using their gifts. And guess what happened when everyone started using the gifts God gave them? Take another look at verse 7. Yes, the Word of God spread more rapidly. Friends, there are so many hurting people who need to dive into the love of Jesus. You know them, we all do! It's a bit overwhelming to think about this, but could it be that the likelihood of them finding Jesus increases if we are each using the gifts God has given us? This is not just the job of our pastors. Each of us has a responsibility to use our gifts for the growing of God's kingdom! Don't let your insecurities or fears or perceived time constraints keep you out of the refreshing waters of serving in God's kingdom. Dive in!

What gifts has God given you?

How are you using them to serve God's people?

-*Marcy Fitzpatrick*

READ: Acts 6:8-15

NOTES: _____

NEXT STEPS: _____

reflection

“But they could not stand up against the wisdom the Spirit gave him as he spoke” (vs 10). Wow, just wow. These were powerful people yet they couldn’t refute Stephen’s words, aka the Holy Spirit. Our words have power when the Holy Spirit is behind them. As a Jesus follower your words mean something and thus, we have to be careful.

Lord forgive me for those moments (you know the ones) where my words have been harmful instead of loving, life-draining instead of life-giving, or just plain wrong. Holy Spirit come and fill me with your words. Amen.

How have your words harmed others?

How have your words been life-giving?

-Sarah Hardin

CHALLENGE: WHO'S COMING TO DINNER?

When was the last time you invited someone to dinner who doesn't look like you, talk like you, love like you, or vote like you? At Ginghamburg, we have a core value that states "we seek and model diversity." Three reasons why this is so important include:

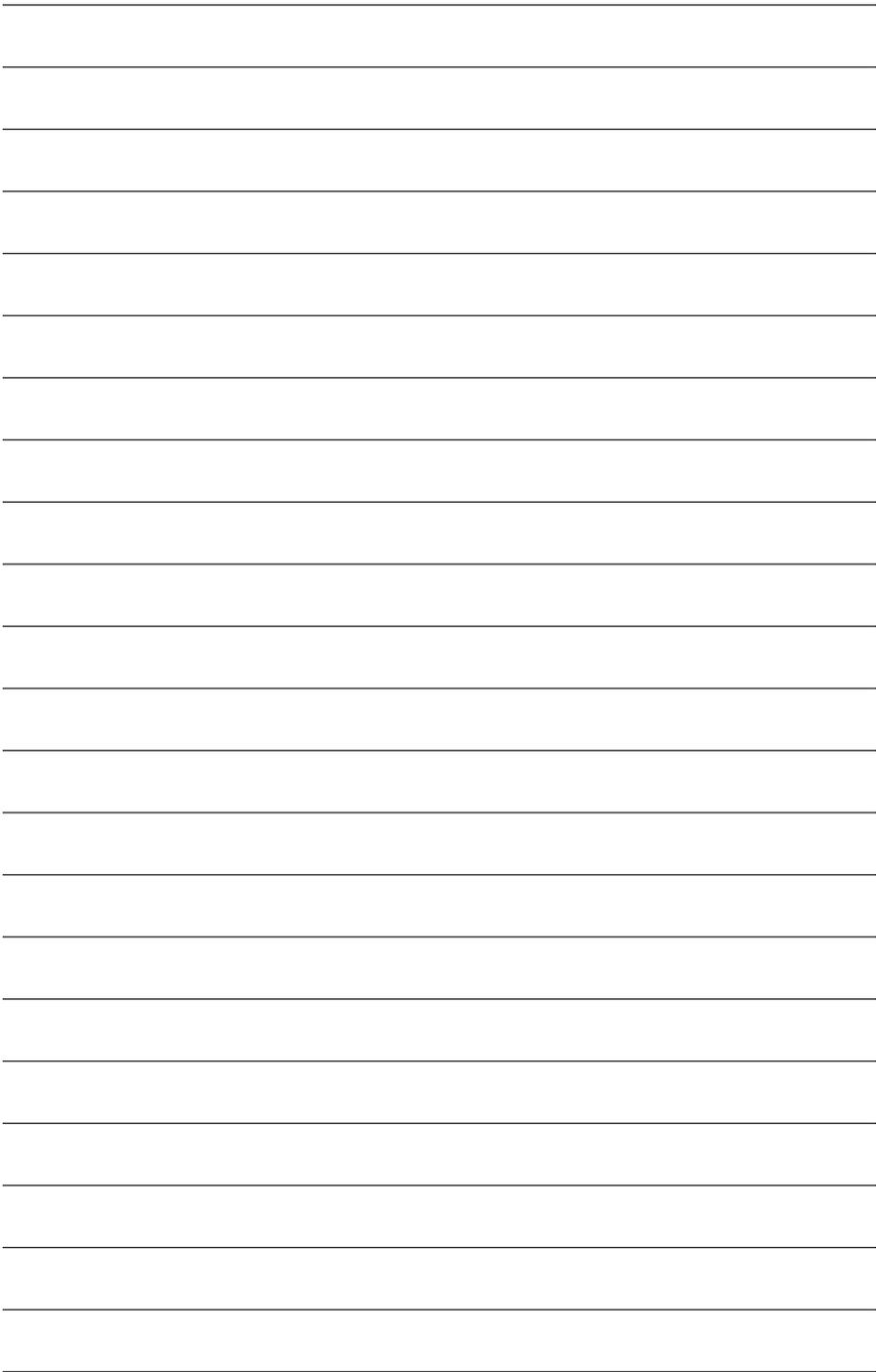
- We want everyone to know that they belong
- We want to do our part to tear down the walls that divide us
- We want to reflect the Kingdom of Heaven

Having an understanding of one another is an important step towards equity, solidarity and building bridges between people who are different from you. I believe the best place to start this work is at the dinner table. Inviting someone over for dinner shows that you care and builds trust and intimacy. At the table you can exchange stories that lead to gaining a better understanding of one another. Don't be afraid to ask questions about things you don't understand and to answer any questions they may have for you. And don't turn down the invitation to join them at their table, this exchange is how relationships are built and cultivated. I want to challenge you today to pray about who you will invite to your dinner table next week as a first step towards building and cultivating a genuine relationship with someone who is not like you.

What are some other ways you can seek and model diversity?

-Marcy Walker

notes



READ: Acts 7

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NEXT STEPS: _____

reflection

Stephen launched into a long speech about Israel's relationship with God in this chapter. From Old Testament history, he showed that the Jews had constantly rejected God's messages and that this counsel had rejected the Messiah, God's Son. He made three main points: (1) Israel's history is the history of God's acts in the world; (2) People worshiped God long before there was a temple; and (3) Jesus' death at the hands of the religious leaders was just one more example of Israel's rebellion against and rejection of God. Stephen didn't really defend himself. Instead, he took the offensive, seizing the opportunity to summarize the history of Israel and their rejection of God's way over the centuries. In doing this, he incensed religious leaders to the point that they called for his death by stoning, making Stephen the first Christian martyr.

If you were called to court and accused of being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you? Are you willing to sacrifice yourself for the spreading of the Gospel? Can you have the hard conversation of telling the corrective truth, even though there will be repercussions? We need to realize that there is always a crowd of witnesses who are listening to that truth. Remember, Stephen's death made a profound impact on Paul, who was there at the stoning and who later became the world's greatest missionary! The world is watching! Let us go and be the Church!

-Karl Penn

READ: Acts 8:1-25

NOTES: _____

NEXT STEPS: _____

reflection

As I read this section of scripture, there was one line that really stood out to me, “Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.” I started thinking about our world and the trying times in which we find ourselves, and I feel like believers have been scattered. We’ve been ripped apart by quarantines, politics, social issues and our allegiances to one ideology or another. But wherever we find ourselves, we should be preaching the Word. That doesn’t always mean overtly preaching and sharing the Gospel. We can often preach the Word louder with our lives than we can with our literal words. If we profess to be a Christian, people are looking to us to see what that means. How are our lives set apart from the rest of the world? How does a Christ-centered person handle adversity? What disciplines do we practice? How do we treat our spouses? How do we invest our time? An area of my life where I’ve been feeling the nudge of the Holy Spirit is how I handle stress and anxiety. I can get frazzled easily. I get angry. I vent. I don’t look like Christ. Several areas of my life reflect the excellence of Christ, but I need growth in this area. I want every area of my life to preach the word to those around me.

How does your life preach the word?

In what area could use some growth?

-James Willoughby

READ: Acts 8:26-40

NOTES: _____

NEXT STEPS: _____

reflection

In this passage, we learn of a divine encounter Philip has with the Ethiopian eunuch. These two men could not have been more different, each from different cultures and possessing different physical characteristics. The eunuch was an official of the queen with much higher status than Philip. The eunuch was an outsider of the religious community and would not have been accepted in the Temple, even though he had visited Jerusalem. The encounter for both the eunuch and Philip were ordained by the Holy Spirit. The eunuch called out to Philip, asked for his explanation of the Scripture he was reading, and even asked to be baptized. Philip responded obediently to his discipleship journey of preaching the Gospel to the ends of the Earth. I think about several unusual attractions I have had to people through a chance encounter at just the right time in my life. Sometimes, it has been a comment a stranger has made to me which unexpectedly encouraged me. Other times, it has been someone thanking me for something that I did to encourage them without me even remembering the encounter! Someone once told me that people are attracted to the Jesus within us before they even know we are Jesus followers. Reflect upon a chance encounter you have had in your life that was clearly God-ordained.

Take a moment to pray for the encounters God will give you, removing any obstacles you may feel to trust the Holy Spirit.

-Kitty Kincaid

READ: Acts 9:1-31

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NEXT STEPS: _____

reflection

Saul's conversion can only be described as a miracle of God. Here was a man whose reputation was built on the persecution of followers of Christ. Yet God chose him to be the one to spread the word about Christ to Gentiles throughout the world. While most of us don't have the same dramatic story as Saul, our conversion story is just as important. Jesus found the way into our hearts just as he did with Saul. Just like Saul, we have a responsibility to encourage others to accept Jesus in theirs.

What was it that convinced you that a relationship with Christ was important to your life?

What keeps you from sharing your story with others?

-Mark Kincaid

READ: Acts 9:32-43

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NEXT STEPS: _____

reflection

The Apostle Peter was used in a mighty way to perform two miracles of healing and bringing the dead to life. Both of these miracles were used to give glory to God and turn those who witnessed these miracles to the Lord by way of repentance. Aeneas was paralyzed, a situation that the natural mind looks at as an irreversible condition, yet Peter healed him and even told him to make his bed. Tabitha, a woman of good deeds, was deceased and raised from the dead. How often have you been faced with a dead situation? Or felt so weary and broken within that there seemed to be no hope? This passage shows us that God can take ANY situation and breathe life into it. There is nothing too great for the power of the most high. I want to encourage you to take inventory of your life and reassess those areas that appear to be stagnate or even dead. Situations? Relationships? TRUST God that he can fix any dead situation in your life, and when he does...use it for HIS Glory.

-Christina Phillips

CHALLENGE: ABIDE IN THE VINE

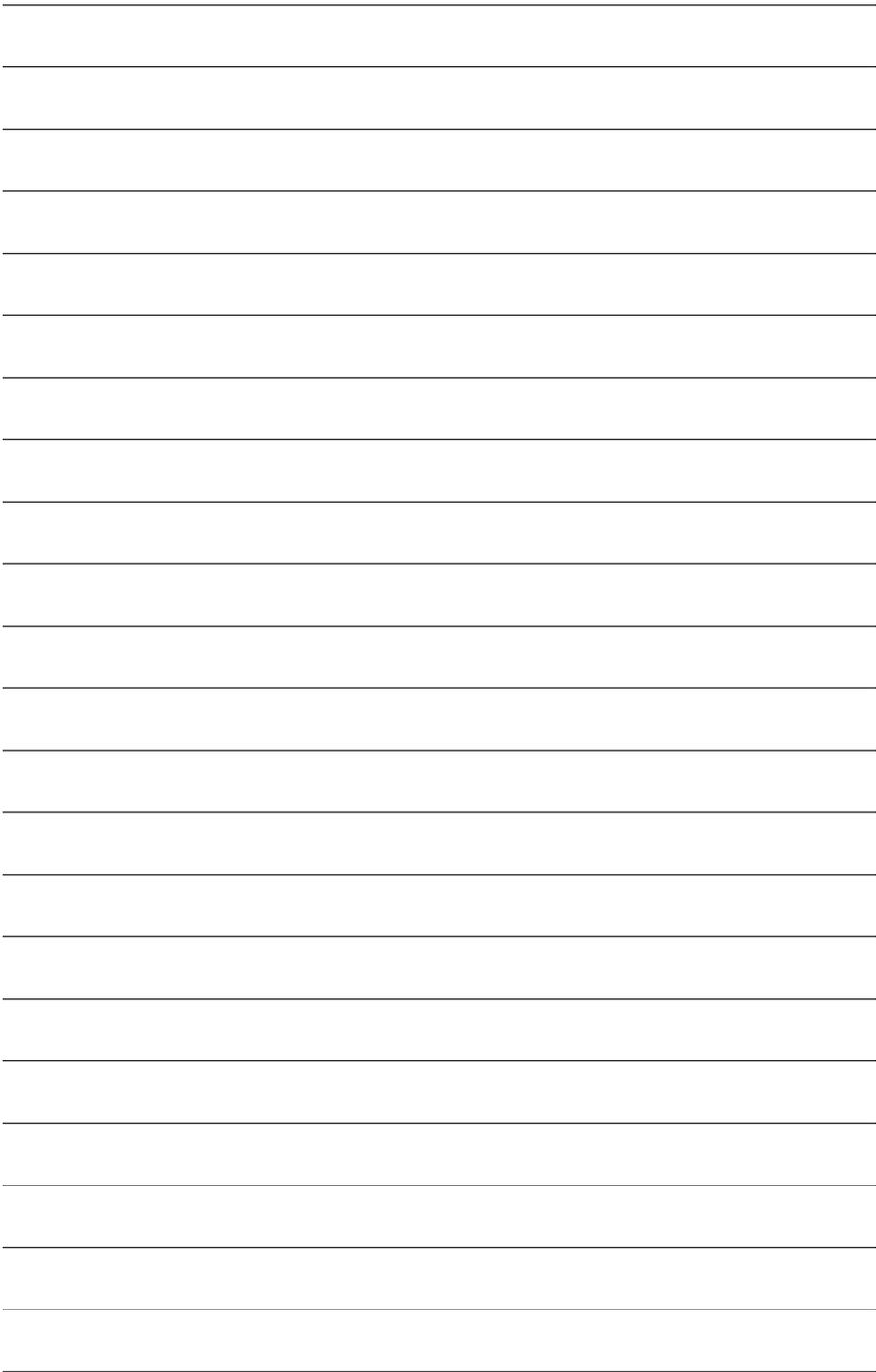
Do you ever have days where you feel so far from God? You are not alone, many of us go through what feels like a deserted place in our lives. I remember feeling this way at the beginning of the pandemic. I felt like I was going through the motions and that my prayers never went higher than the ceiling of whatever room I was in. It even made me question my call. Later on that week I received a package in the mail from an anonymous sender that contained a sweatshirt. On the sweatshirt was a simple phrase, "ABIDE IN THE VINE JN15." In John chapter 15, Jesus said to remain in him and he will remain in you. Jesus is the vine and God is the vineyard keeper, if we remain connected to the vine we will bear much fruit. Apart from the vine we can do nothing. Today I want you to take a look at John 15 and answer the following questions:

- What does it mean to abide in the vine?
- What can you be doing to intentionally abide in the vine?
- How can you encourage others who may feel like they are in a desert place?

I want to remind you that God never leaves or forsakes us. It's up to us to abide.

-Marcy Walker

notes



READ: Acts 10

NOTES: _____

NEXT STEPS: _____

reflection

Today's reading is a powerful view of the Holy Spirit breaking barriers and bringing people's hearts to know the truth of Jesus Christ. In verse 13, it reads "Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat." Peter comes from a tradition where eating an animal like this would make him unclean. Through Peter and the story about Cornelius, God is continuing to show us that he is not confined by human laws and standards. Where does God look then to find the righteous? The heart! In verses 34-35 Peter says, "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right." God accepts everyone whose heart is pure. Connection and power from God weren't just for the righteous or even the Jewish people. God broke the boundaries and made known his power was available for all people like he promised.

Who have you been calling/thinking is unclean?

What does God say about these people?

-Jayden Groppi

READ: Acts 11:1-18

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NEXT STEPS: _____

reflection

Here Peter is having to explain to his fellow believers why he spent time with the outcasts (Gentiles) who were considered unclean. He's being questioned about breaking the practices held so dear by the believers. He had to get into specific detail about what drew him to them and how that message came to him. When I was younger, a man came to our home. He was good friends with my mother from school. He had long, wavy brown hair and wore a leather jacket. He rode a motorcycle. I had DOUBTS that he had actually spent any time with my mother. I had seen her high school pictures. She had cute preppy clothes and a flip hairstyle. He looked like an outlaw! I realized, as he spent the evening at our house, that he had the most amazing singing voice! It turns out they met and had become friends in the choir in high school. After we ate, they both started singing songs from their days in high school. They also sang some hymns. By the time he left, I realized we were all much more alike than we were different. He was a believer and had become a pastor since leaving high school. He was the kind of Jesus Follower that shocked people. There were probably a lot of old ladies holding their purses tighter in church when he walked in – only to find out he was the pastor!

-Stephanie Tracy

Wednesday, July 6

READ: Acts 11:19-30

NOTES: _____

NEXT STEPS: _____

reflection

God is coming for a church where ordinary men do extraordinary things. The start of the Church of Antioch marked it as one of the most influential moments in Christian faith, as the church blended Jews and Gentiles. Scattered men and women came together after the persecution of Stephen. The blessing was that “the Lord’s hand was with them,” and many people turned to the faith. The church grew and connected to other churches and the gospel was spread. Also significant is the mention of the Holy Spirit and faith. As believers, it is important to be a church that is connected to the Holy Spirit and God’s great commission as found in Matthew 28:18-20. “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” God blesses a church full of grace, willing to go to corrupt, even desolate, places to share the love of Christ with those who do not know Jesus.

Have you decided to take part in the extraordinary move of God, as part of the body of Christ?

Are you prepared to share the Gospel at times when it is unpopular for your brothers and sisters in a foreign land?

-Adeanna Wingfield

READ: Acts 12

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NEXT STEPS: _____

reflection

Pray. Arise. Follow. Tell your story.

Time and time again I find an order to God's provision in the Bible: seek God, be ready, follow his guidance and tell others the story of how God works. Peter was a strong leader and teacher of the early church. Yet in Acts 12, he was in prison with time running out until King Herod would kill him. Alone, heavily guarded and chained, there was nothing that Peter could do in this story. Except what freed him was prayer from others, Peter's readiness to follow God's leading and in the end telling others the story. Through it all, God's power shines through and many gained faith and followed Jesus.

Name a situation where you are or were "chained."

Who did you ask to pray for God's wisdom or help during this time?

Did you know you have many God stories to tell?

Are you willing to tell your story so others will have faith and follow Jesus?

-Cheryl Bender

READ: Acts 13:1-12

NOTES: _____

NEXT STEPS: _____

reflection

Barnabas and Saul fasted, prayed and the church community laid hands on them before they were sent away filled with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit gave Saul the wisdom and words to protect their mission and stand against the sorcerer, who tried to keep faith away from the people. God gives us the fuel that's sustainable: God's Word and the Holy Spirit. It is important to be in a community that is filled with God's Word and Spirit too, so that together we can be obedient when God calls on us to do God's work and to empower us with wisdom when the enemy is fighting against us.

Do you have a community of God's people to help you grow stronger in God's Word and Holy Spirit?

-Margie DeHayes

CHALLENGE: USE YOUR GIFTS TO SERVE

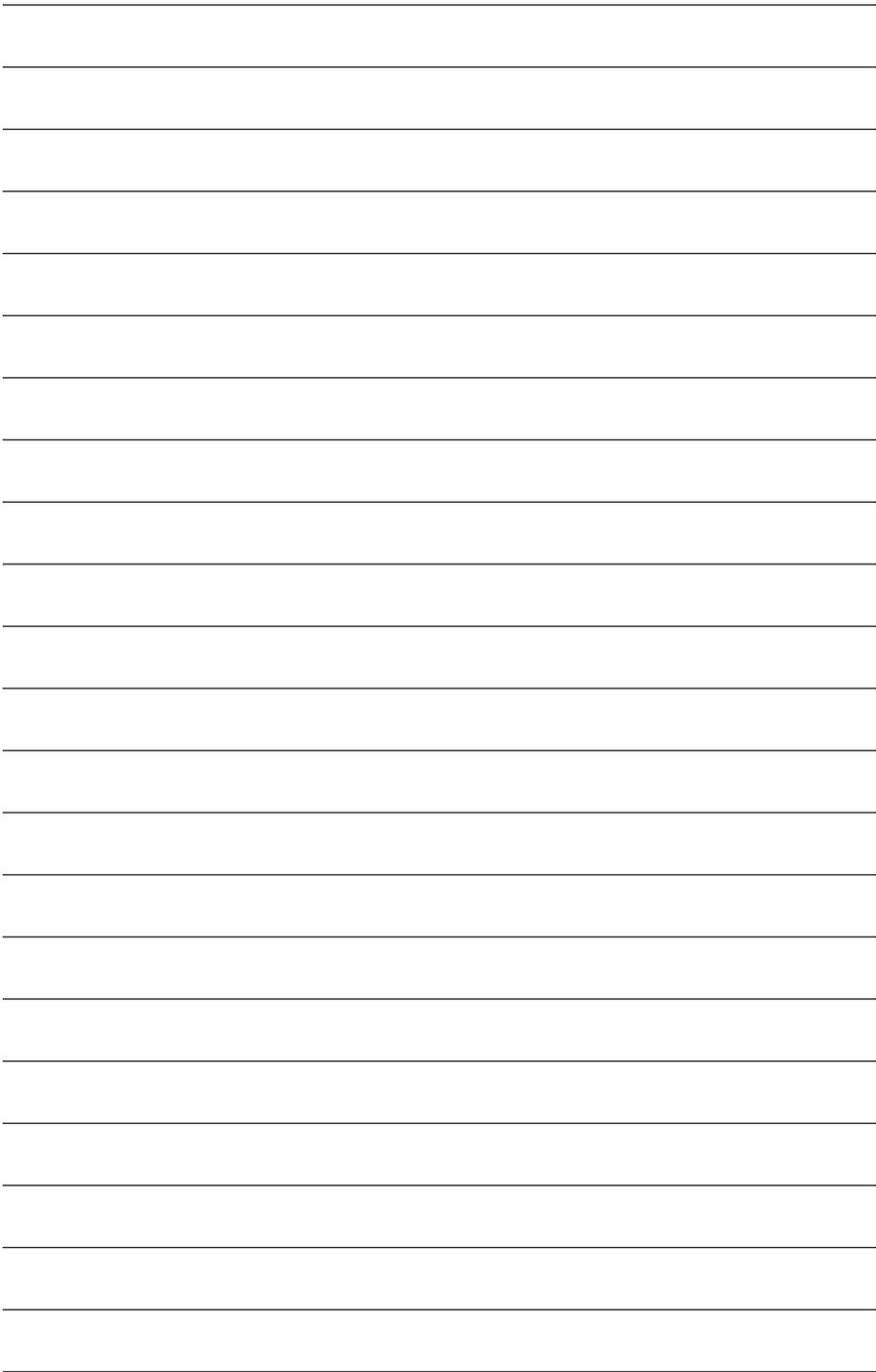
“The thief on the cross next to Jesus was saved through his faith alone, and is in heaven today.” This profession of faith and salvation is often cited as proof that baptism, saying the sinner’s prayer, or good works are not required for us to be saved and to go to heaven. This is true in that the story demonstrates to us that Jesus’ salvation is a true gift and cannot be paid for with works or other actions.

But God never intended you to accept Jesus into your heart then sit on your hands and keep it to yourself. God wants us to have soft hearts and hard feet. As Christians, he wants us to love him, value and love others as ourselves, and share the message of the gospel everywhere.

In John 15:1-8, if Jesus is the vine, and we are the branches, will God see that we produce fruit, or are we just a fruitless, withering branch waiting to be pruned off the vine and burned? God gave each of us a set of spiritual gifts that uniquely qualify us to serve his will for us. By leveraging the Holy Spirit along with your gifts, you can achieve your true purpose while performing great works in his name and helping grow his heavenly Kingdom. Take time to investigate your spiritual gifts and see how you can best use them to serve God this year.

–Lee Davis

notes



READ: Acts 13:13-52

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NEXT STEPS: _____

reflection

There are several things we can take away from this passage. First and foremost, what sticks out to me is in verse 39, when the passage says “everyone who believes is set free from every sin.” Through Jesus’ death and resurrection the prophecy was fulfilled, we are freed from the bondage of our sins and we are saved by grace. Second, it’s our job as followers of Christ to go and share with others the story of Jesus and his love and grace towards all people. Your story doesn’t have to be fancy, rehearsed, or something complicated, it just simply needs to convey what Christ Jesus has done in your life and how God has transformed you from the inside out. When we share our faith story and journey with others, God works in remarkable ways to further his kingdom. Finally, we have to realize that sharing our God/faith journey with others isn’t always going to be easy or well-received. You may be shut down, you may be asked to leave. But you took the time to plant a seed by sharing, and God continues to use those seeds planted in a non-believer’s heart to grow them, and you, closer to him.

–Chelsea Whirlledge

READ: Acts 14

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NEXT STEPS: _____

reflection

“Stick to the Status Quo” is a featured song in the musical “High School Musical.” Since my daughter was the director, I recently enjoyed four performances of this show in a weekend. While watching the performers sing about breaking out of the preconceived molds they were confined to, I was pondering the boxes we live in, the labels we wear. They may be of our own making, but other people often prevent us from breaking free because they prefer a version of us that feels safe and predictable. Paul and Barnabas were in uncharted territory. They had preached to both Jews and Gentiles and found fellow believers of both persuasions. But the new believers had expectations based on past experiences. Their expectations persuaded them that the traveling evangelists were actually gods. They were trying to stick with the status quo – making this encounter with the triune God fit within their worldview. Paul and Barnabas pushed back against the expectations. They wanted the new believers to understand the vast difference between them as ambassadors and the mighty, omnipotent God they served. It was time to break the status quo.

When have you pushed against the status quo to please God instead of pleasing people?

–Kate Johnson

READ: Acts 15:1-21

NOTES: _____

NEXT STEPS: _____

reflection

Acts 15 tells the compelling story of one of the greatest tests first century Christians faced. Christianity had been birthed out of Judaism. Jesus himself was born and raised as a Jew. Although Jesus clearly articulated the Gospel message of love, grace and forgiveness, change did not come easily as we all know. Both Jews and Gentiles (all people other than Jews) were coming to Christ in record numbers. Some of the converted Jews, however, found it difficult to give up 1,500 years of Jewish traditions. They sought a compromise: Gentiles and Jews could become Christians, but they should agree to be circumcised first. Early church leaders included Peter, the outspoken disciple who had denied Christ, Paul, formerly known as Saul, who had persecuted Christians before his conversion and James, the brother of Jesus who was not a believer until the resurrection of Jesus. What an unlikely crew of leaders! Sensing this was a critical moment, these men and others gathered in Jerusalem to debate and settle this issue. Was circumcision necessary to be a Christian? Lengthy debate followed, with both sides getting an opportunity to explain their position. Those present decided circumcision was not a requirement to become a Christian. It was faith alone in Christ.

What were the lessons learned, both for these early Christians and for us?

-Rich Wallace

READ: Acts 15:22-33

NOTES: _____

NEXT STEPS: _____

reflection

Sometimes it's easy to get distracted and confused about what is true in my faith. I am thankful for my church, that there are people I can discuss this with who give me wise counsel. I am thankful for my confirmation days as a youth, where I learned the hallmarks of our Christian faith: God is the Three in One – the Father, Son and Holy Spirit – that Jesus is the son of God, and we are saved by grace. As these verses tell us, the Holy Spirit will lead us to the truth and guide us to choose behaviors for healthy living. God does not want us to be distracted or confused and does not make our faith complicated. Quite the opposite! Just as in the days of Acts, God has ordained ordinary people to walk beside us, encourage us, and teach us. But, we as believers must be intentional in our faith journey by placing ourselves within these communities. I want to encourage you today to check out places in our church to grow such as Alpha, A Follower's Life, a life group or a class. Real growth happens in discussions with small groups of people ordained by the church to lead.

How is God calling you to grow in your understanding of living the Christian faith?

Who has God placed in your path to help you in your faith? Do you need to join a class or call upon that person today?

-Kitty Kincaid

READ: Acts 15:36-41

NOTES: _____

NEXT STEPS: _____

reflection

By its very nature, anything on earth is temporary. This can be a hard fact to come to grips with, especially when it comes to relationships. Paul and Barnabas were what my kids my call “besties,” or “BFF’s.” They traveled, taught, and even suffered together. They likely thought, as I think we often do, that they would be together “forever.” The truth is, there is no forever on Earth, only with Christ in Heaven. And so a relatively simple disagreement brought this amazing partnership to an end; but that’s not the end of the story... You see, we all tend to make connections with others. We were built for relationships. Sometimes they’re very deep. And sometimes they get broken. And it hurts. I imagine Paul felt quite betrayed. But Paul had a Purpose: to continue to spread the Good News. I’m sure there was a period of mourning for the lost relationship, but Paul put himself right back out there with Silas, risking being hurt once again, but choosing to share his life with someone else despite the likelihood that he’d get hurt again.

What joy are you depriving yourself of because you fear that the joy will someday end?

What relationship do you need God to step into today to either heal the connection or help you find your Silas?

-Jon Sears

CHALLENGE: WORSHIP

“The discipline of worship is an essential practice for the believer. Like breathing is necessary for life, so worship is necessary for knowing God. Both breathing and worship are practices that seem simple, but if you become proficient at both there are great advantages.” – Pastor Michael J. Maticcik.

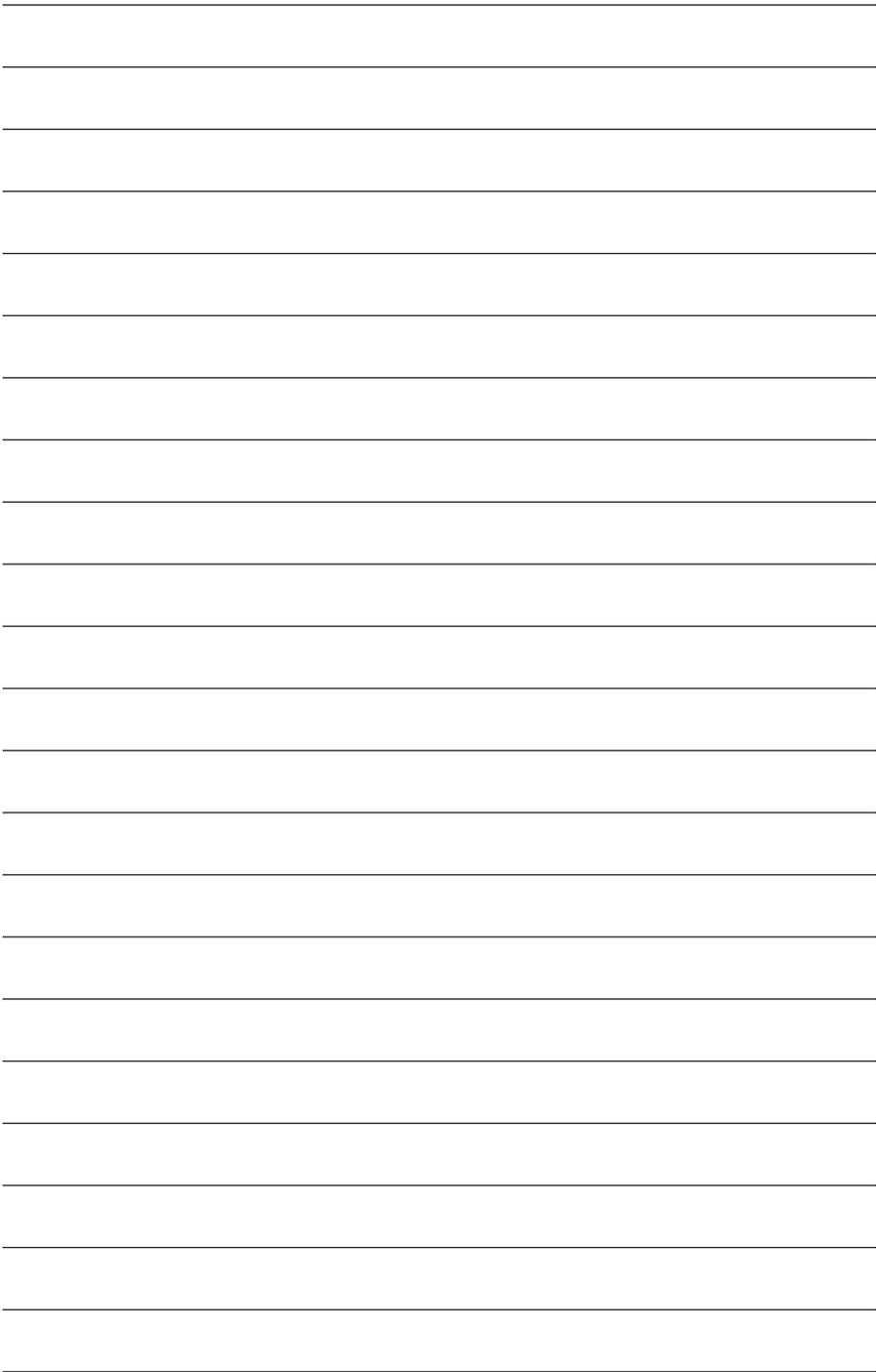
Today I want to focus on the discipline of who we worship rather than how. Oftentimes we find ourselves worshipping our problems or our jobs. We worship things or even ideas. What this means is that we put those things front and center! We start to trust that these things are the source of our lives. When we make it a practice to focus on Jesus daily, we’re aligning ourselves with the truth that he is our source, redeemer, and savior. Each day as we make intentional time to focus on God we recognize that we can’t do this on our own. Worship helps us become more aware that God is always with us. Worship shifts our focus from being self-centered to being God-centered. The discipline of worship is extremely important to our daily walk. I like to walk and talk with God or while I’m ironing my clothes. Try to find small moments and then work your way up. Five minutes in worship can change your entire day!

What are some simple ways you make time to worship?

Do you have full concerts in your car as you drive?

–Chris Wingfield

notes



READ: Acts 16:1-10

NOTES: _____

NEXT STEPS: _____

reflection

Good leaders look for and prepare others to lead. It should be our goal as followers of Jesus to not only share this Jesus life with others, but to encourage and empower others to grow in their walk and to lead others to do the same. Paul is demonstrating this here. Timothy is already a disciple of Jesus, but Paul takes Timothy under his wing as a mentee to prepare him to lead others in this Jesus walk. If we want to grow in any area both spiritually and naturally, it is important that we surround ourselves with good mentors. As we grow and develop in these areas let's seek out those whom we can share these gifts with.

Who are your natural and spiritual mentors? If you don't have mentors I want to encourage you to prayerfully seek mentors out.

What gifts do you have that you can share with someone else that is looking to grow in that area?

-*Marcy Walker*

READ: Acts 16:11-15

NOTES: _____

NEXT STEPS: _____

reflection

There are four things about this passage that stand out to me. 1) Lydia was a worshiper of God. 2) She listened. 3) God opened her heart. 4) She was baptized. How many of us consider ourselves to be worshipers of God, but we have a hard time actually listening to the voice of God? We worship. We pray. We tell God how amazing he is and say we trust him. Sometimes we even shake our fists and question God but we don't actually sit back and take time to LISTEN to the voice of God. I wonder if we listened more, how much more peace, clarity, and direction we would sense from the Holy Spirit? I wonder, if we learned to recognize the voice of God, how it would alter so many of our decisions? Lydia was a worshiper. That day, she listened, and God moved. That simple decision to be still not only shifted her faith, but the course of her life. The stillness of that day allowed God to move in a way like never before.

Do you remember a time when you sensed the Lord speaking to you? Did taking the time to be still help you feel closer to him? Did it bring clarity?

Have you experienced the overwhelming freedom of baptism?

What is God saying to you at this moment?

-Emily Schulte

READ: Acts 16:16-40

NOTES: _____

NEXT STEPS: _____

reflection

Today's scripture is about a slave girl who has the ability to tell people their fortunes. However, the reality is that a spirit inside her is the real culprit of her abilities. Paul gets annoyed with the spirit and calls it out. When the girl is free, she no longer has her ability and causes a great loss to her slave master. Evil mixed with a perceived good is never a good combination. Once she lost her value, her master was out to get Paul and Silas. Paul was really doing something good by ridding the girl of evil, but when the evil was so valuable to her master, Paul was punished. But as the story goes, Paul was not going to let the punishment for doing good ruin his faith. How could you sing and rejoice, locked up and shackled in a prison? They did it and God blessed them. The ground shook and the prison was unlocked. But Paul continued to do good and stay put. All the obedience and goodness in this story ended up bringing more people to Christ. I can think of some things in today's world that are perceived as good but in reality, evil lurks in the shadows and ruins people's lives.

Have you ever been caught up in a perceived good situation...maybe a scam, only to learn it was a bad deal? How did God bring goodness from it?

-Brenda Baker

READ: Acts 17

NOTES: _____

NEXT STEPS: _____

reflection

Spreading the good news to those who don't know anything about Jesus has always seemed to be difficult for me. It's easy to tell them my faith journey and how I got to where I am today, but I become nervous when I feel led to go up to people and tell them about the story of Jesus and why it's better with him in their life. In Acts 17, we see Paul and his companions going from town to town, usually to a Jewish synagogue, to profess the coming of the Messiah. Paul would enter the synagogue and wisely began talking about the Old Testament writings and explaining how the Messiah fulfilled them, moving from the known to the unknown. This is a good strategy for us. When we witness for Christ, we should begin where people are, affirming the truth they do know, and then we can present Jesus, the one who is truth. Paul later goes to Athens, where again he goes to the synagogue and reasons with both Jews and God-fearing Greeks. Paul explained the one true God to these educated men of Athens. Although these men were in general, very religious, they did not know God. Christianity is talked about a lot today, but to most people, God is still unknown. We need to proclaim who he is and make clear what he has done for everyone through his son, Jesus Christ.

Who do you need to tell the good news to?

-Scott Plantz

READ: Acts 18

NOTES: _____

NEXT STEPS: _____

reflection

The Apostle Paul begins this chapter by attempting to persuade Jews and Greeks that Jesus is the Messiah. After some pushback during his message, Paul says, “Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent of it. From now on I will go to the Gentiles” (verse 6). As I dug deeper into this chapter I uncovered that Corinth was a significant city and major port. However, it has a dark history – some say even the worst reputation in the area. From having 1000 prostitutes to a citizen base known for drunkenness, Corinth I’m sure, was no walk in the park. In this dark place, Paul shed light on the people, thousands were baptized there. The Lord spoke to Paul one night in a vision saying, “Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you and no one is going to attack and harm you because I have many people in the city” (verse 11). Jesus gave Paul the encouragement to witness the Messiah in a dark sin-filled place. Let this be an inspiration, that we can be a witness well beyond our one hour at church on Sundays. No matter where we are who we are around, let us be the voice championing our savior.

-Leo Berbach

CHALLENGE: THIS IS HOW I FIGHT MY BATTLES

I don't want to shock you, but sometimes...life is hard. 🤔

I know I'm not the only one who has ever thought, "God, I don't know how much more I can take," or "God, how long can THIS go on? The pressure of IT is killing me." The THIS's and IT's in this world can begin to drag us under, and sometimes we can be so tired that it's hard to fight back.

Y'all there is hope. Here are a few tips from some of our team.

Marcy Walker: Time alone with God. I have to shut distractions off as much as possible.

Erica Baer: I turn on worship music and sing or worship through it!! I also journal and pray the Psalms.

John Whirlledge: Music has always been where I've connected with God. Sometimes it's simply listening or playing and singing on my own.

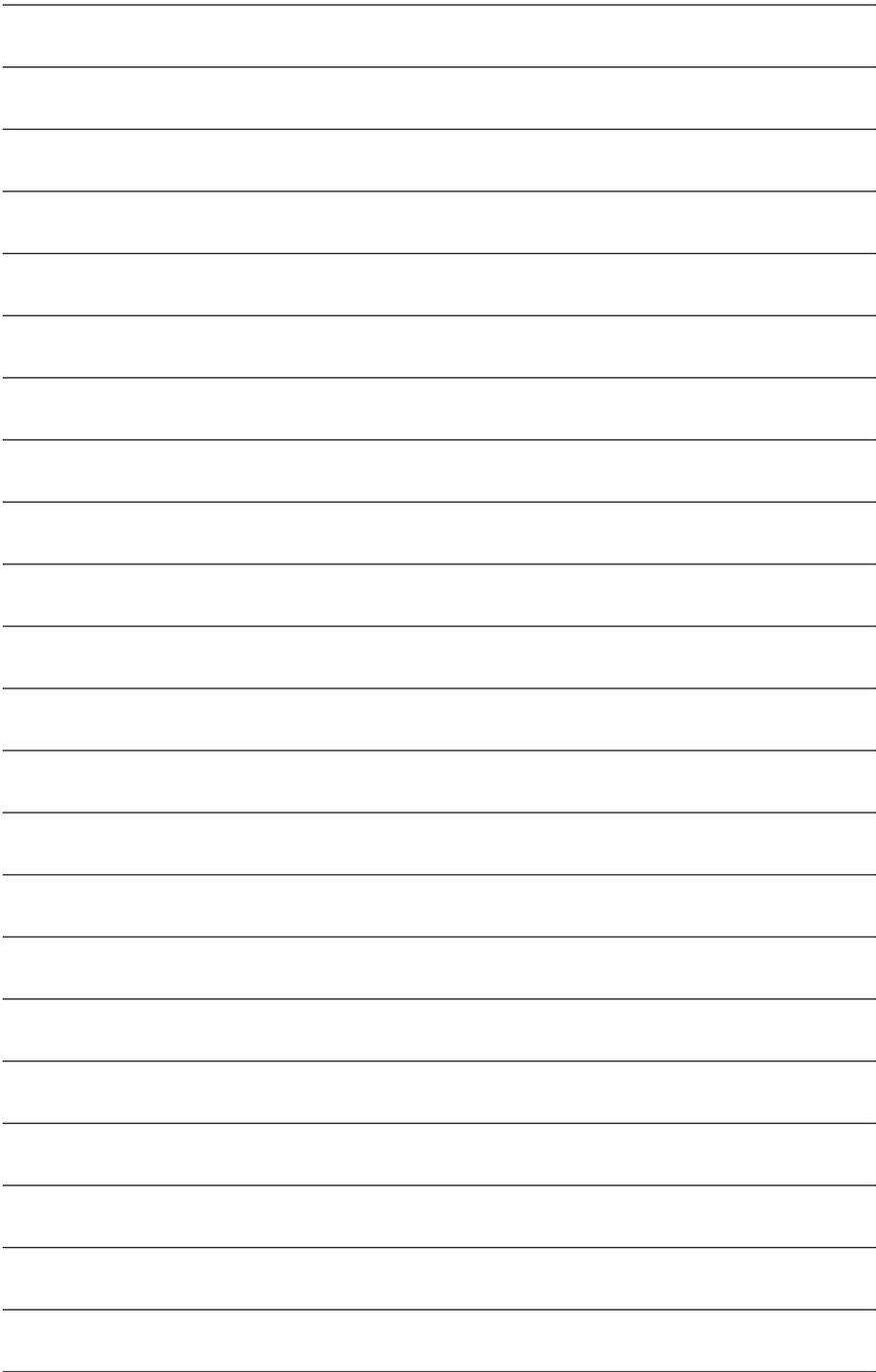
As for me, I land face down in prayer. The quieter the space the better. I wrestle it out with God in my mind and I don't get up until I start to feel an inner peace.

Sometimes we need a partner to fight our battles with us. Don't hesitate to reach out to a friend just like I reached out to John, Marcy and Erica. We are better together.

God loves you and will be with you through the hard times. Rest in that my friends.

-Sarah Hardin

notes



READ: Acts 19

NOTES: _____

NEXT STEPS: _____

reflection

One of the scariest images I can think of is the image or scene of a person possessed by a demonic spirit. Hollywood has cashed in mightily on this frightening situation. The scene in chapter 19 describes to us Jewish leaders of the day driving out demons in Jesus' name and in Paul's preaching of Jesus. But on one occasion the demon challenged their authority: "I know Jesus, and I know of Paul. So, who are you?" And because it saw no spiritual authority in them, it used the man it possessed to beat the ones trying to drive it out. This spiritual battle scene clearly illustrates how we cannot defeat evil under our own power. We need Jesus Christ's salvation in our hearts and the Holy Spirit's power in our life to resist the devil with authority and make him tremble and flee. Search your own heart and ask yourself the question:

Who are you? When the devil sees you, does he see Christ in you?

-Lee Davis

READ: Acts 20

NOTES: _____

NEXT STEPS: _____

reflection

“Not knowing what will happen to me there” (verse 22). What is worse? Knowing or not knowing? We spend so much of our lives worrying about not knowing what will happen to us. I remember when I went to a job interview in Detroit. I had grown up in the South, but now I was considering transplanting my family way North. I truly did not know what would happen to us there, but I did know that my faith would proceed us. I knew that the Holy Spirit would be with us no matter what we faced. Paul did not know what would happen to him in Jerusalem, but he was willing to take the risk because of his task of testifying to the good news of God’s grace. The Holy Spirit did know and warned him of prison and hardship. He realized his task was more important than his fear of not knowing. We too are charged with testifying the good news and to go against the status quo and forge into the unknown. We too have the Holy Spirit to comfort and guide us. So just as Paul did, we do not know what will happen, but we do know that the Holy Spirit knows.

Where are you being called to, where you truly don’t know what will happen there?

Is the task of testifying to the good news of God’s grace sufficient for YOU to go there?

–*Oliver Leembruggen*

READ: Acts 21: 1-41

NOTES: _____

NEXT STEPS: _____

reflection

Have you ever had someone try to talk you out of something you thought God has called you to? Often it's out of fear or confusion. Sometimes it's genuine concern. Let's read verse 4 again: Through the Spirit they urged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem. Did you catch that? It wasn't their emotions driving their concern, but the Spirit. What they were asking Paul to do was a forecast of things to come. How do I know this, you ask? Let's look at verse 11: Coming over to us, he took Paul's belt, tied his own hands and feet with it and said, "The Holy Spirit says, 'In this way the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.'" The prophet confirms the concerns that the members had in verse 4. On the surface it looked like fear, but in reality it was a heads up to Paul. What are we gathering from this? It may seem like your circle is being counterproductive, but sometimes there is wisdom in their concerns. Don't be so quick to dismiss their words because they appear to be against where you are headed. Take a moment to listen and pray on what is being said.

Do you have people around speaking a word of caution to you?

Have you dismissed it before praying?

-Chris Wingfield

READ: Acts 22

NOTES: _____

NEXT STEPS: _____

reflection

My first attempt at attending church was in high school—Saturday night service with my Papaw John. I didn't know it was a recovery service, I just thought that people gave their testimony each week at every church. I loved it. But that journey wasn't for me; my head was on straight, I have so much privilege. My faith-walk would evolve steadily, drama-free. Six years ago, my second attempt at faith was after meeting God on my kitchen floor, tear-streaked face and sobs to match. I was in a dark valley, brokenhearted, my family in shambles, and no hope in sight. But, right on that floor, my faith went from zero-to-hundred. It was so sudden I didn't know how to process the emotions—I was actively experiencing my own redemption, witnessing God's incredible love. After years of "doing the work," it was time to proactively disciple, to speak my testimony, to openly share the goodness that God can bring out of a dark valley. Even if that means talking about THE HARD THINGS to people I barely know. Because something I've undoubtedly learned is that God will put people in your path who need your testimony. To this day, hearing someone's redemption story—bearing witness to their testimony—is my favorite part of God's work. But we must be brave enough to talk about it.

Like Paul in Acts 22, will you speak about how God has worked miracles in your life and publicly share your redemption story?

–Kerimay Berbach

READ: Acts 23

NOTES: _____

NEXT STEPS: _____

reflection

Such chaos and drama are in this chapter! Yet right in the middle of all of this confusion and the murderous threats on Paul's life, Jesus stands by Paul and tells him to θαρσέω (tharseō) or "take courage." θαρσέω also means "bolstered because warmed up," "emboldened from within," or "to radiate warm confidence because warm hearted." This sounds something like John Wesley's experience of his heart being strangely warmed when he put his faith in Christ. Paul is reassured by Christ that he will continue on in his mission. This reassurance mentions nothing about the ease of the endeavor. We hear this reassurance and are reminded of the scene in Mark 4. There, Jesus was saying to the disciples, "Let's go to the other side," before getting in a boat to cross a lake during what would soon be a deadly storm. Jesus' faith allowed him to sleep during the peril, knowing they would indeed cross to the other side. His incredulous disciples wake him and ask if he cares that they could drown. In reply Jesus asks where their faith is. Where is our faith? It is in our hearts. The warmth of our faith can be kindled by Jesus when we need it most, an inner resource that will sustain us through all the chaos and drama we may face.

How is my faith sustaining me?

Jesus, please stand by us and warm our hearts.

-Martha Brown

CHALLENGE: THE BEST LAID PLANS

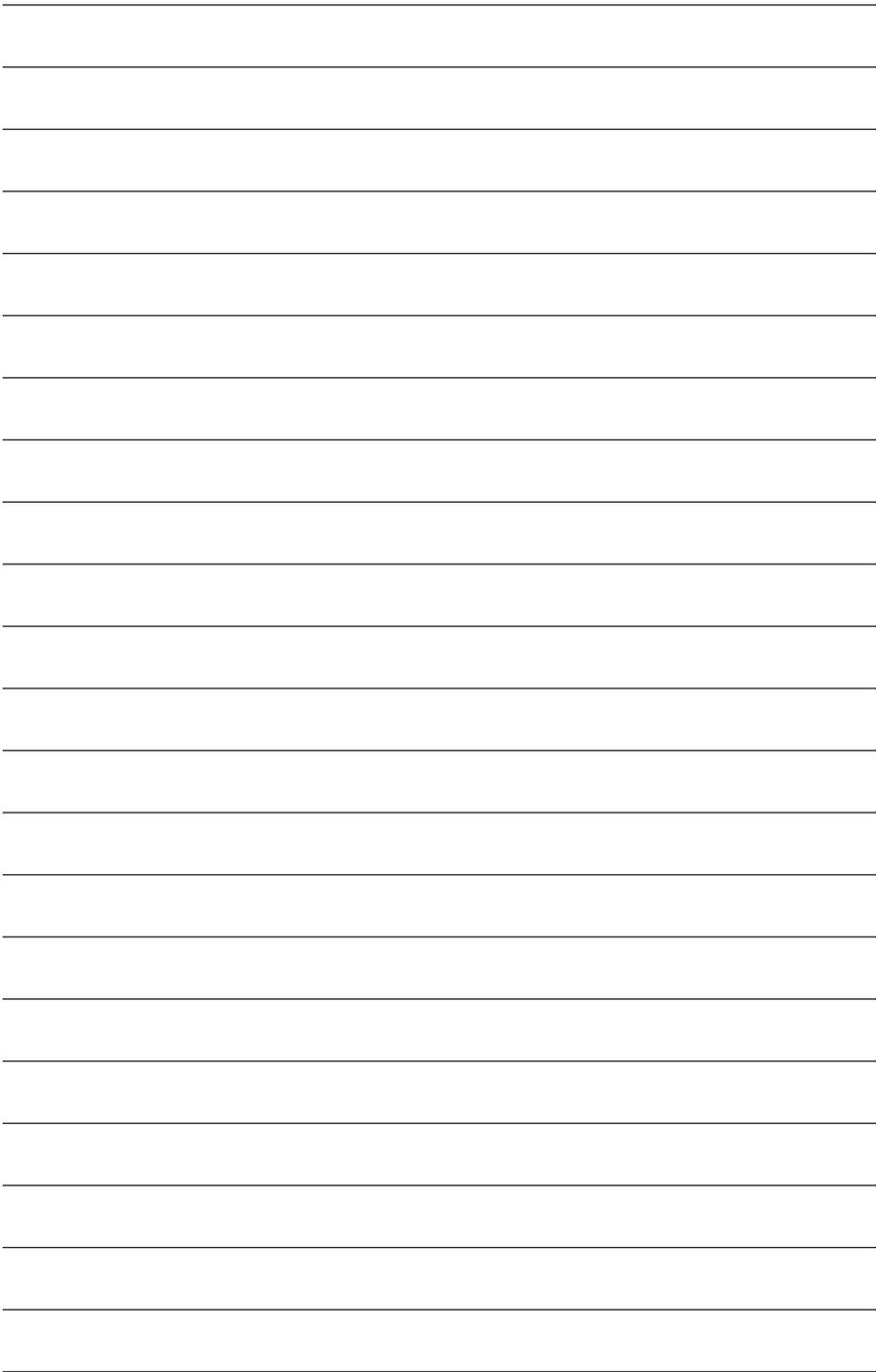
We are our own worst enemy. Overcrowding schedules, underestimating travel time and trying to do just one more thing. Here are a few “Lazy Genius Principles” that I find helpful.

1. Ask yourself, “What can I do now to make something easier later?”
2. Batch tasks. Spend an hour cutting all the veggies for dinner for the entire week. The mess and dishes for that task are done too!
3. Let people in. If you are caring for an aging parent or your spouse is out of town on business, let your friends or Life Group bring you a meal or give you an afternoon off.
4. Live in the Season. When the kids are out of school for summer you can’t keep the same routine you had during the school year. If you are in a season of life raising tiny humans, this might not be the season to start growing and preserving all of the food your family needs for an entire year.
5. Be kind to yourself. You aren’t perfect. Life isn’t perfect. There is debate over whether you can “have it all”. One thing I am sure of, you can’t have it all at once.

For more Lazy Genius Principles check out “The Lazy Genius Way” by Kendra Adachi. She also has a podcast by the same name.

–Shannon Flora

notes



Monday, August 1

READ: Acts 24

NOTES: _____

NEXT STEPS: _____

reflection

I want to focus on the aftermath of the original case presentation where Felix brings his wife to listen to Paul speak on his faith in Jesus Christ. As Paul discoursed on righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and said, "That's enough for now!" Most of us have been there at some point in our Christian walk. But Paul must have sensed that Felix was experiencing a spark of sincerity and concern. However lust, pride, greed, and selfish ambition made it continually inconvenient for Felix to change. And, after two years, he was recalled to Rome to answer for disturbances and irregularities in his rule. An opportunity fumbled by punting the decision of Paul's case down the road. In this season, will we be of good conscience to speak about the truth concerning our Lord and his righteousness imparted to us through his sacrifice on the cross? Saul, who became the Apostle Paul, spoke the truth and changed lives. Are not we encouraged to do the same because:

We are children of the Living God. We are brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ through adoption into God's family. We are saints doing the work of the ministry in our spheres of influence guided by the Holy Spirit.

Go in confidence, my friends.

-Gary Crowell

READ: Acts 25

NOTES: _____

NEXT STEPS: _____

reflection

Paul is in a tough situation in Acts 25. He's been under house arrest for the last couple of years because of his previous trial, and now he's about to be put on trial again. The Jewish leaders have been plotting to get rid of Paul, but thanks to God's provision, all of their attempts have been thwarted. Now Paul has to defend himself against two very powerful Roman leaders, Festus and King Agrippa. Paul knows he's innocent, but in the face of such passionate opposition, anybody would be nervous. The presence of King Agrippa doesn't help either. He comes from a long line of Jesus-haters: his father martyred the first apostle, his grandfather beheaded John the Baptist, and his great-grandfather tried to kill baby Jesus. Paul didn't choke up or take the safe route though. He preached the Gospel in the middle of his trial, which is basically the reason he's there in the first place! But Paul showed no fear. God had brought him to safety thus far, and he had reason to believe God's grace would continue. Many of the Bible's greatest faced false accusations, including Jesus. The world will always judge us, but the only judgment that should concern us is God's. Even in the moments where it would be easier to lie low, keep your focus on God.

What areas of your life are you nervous to show your faith?

What would you do in Paul's situation?

-Aliyah Bing

READ: Acts 26

NOTES: _____

NEXT STEPS: _____

reflection

Paul is on trial. He stands before the most powerful man in Jerusalem, King Agrippa. This man could have him put to death. That's the verdict Paul's enemies are hoping for. After all, he is promoting the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus, who called himself the Christ, the Messiah. The one who had been crucified at their insistence. Paul's defense is his own personal story. Once a zealous persecutor of followers of Jesus, Paul encountered the risen Christ. A bright light from heaven and a voice declaring, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting!" God told him: "I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light..." Paul's personal story is powerful and so is ours. It is the story of Jesus in our lives, our deeply personal encounters with Christ. Jesus appears to each of us in the way that best gets our attention. It is the revelation of the Spirit - I am Jesus - to our spirits as we open ourselves to the crucified and resurrected Christ. This is our story. Others shared their Jesus stories with us and, in them, we caught a glimpse of him. Let's share our stories. In the retelling, Jesus is made known - not only to the hearer but revealed to ourselves in a newer, deeper way.

Who needs to hear your story? Are you open to the changes that are coming?

-Sarah Hardin

READ: Acts 27

NOTES: _____

NEXT STEPS: _____

reflection

Verses 10 – 20: Paul tells the centurion a storm is coming that would make the voyage disastrous and to not proceed, but the centurion chose to listen to others and sailed into the storm. Do we listen when God speaks? Or do we choose to listen to others, or follow our thoughts when we're afraid to follow God's plan? How many times have I heard that voice saying don't choose that path, but I do anyway? Verses 21, 22, 33 – 38: Sometimes we sail along on our own not feeding our heart and soul with his word, not relying on the Holy Spirit to give us the strength, confidence and ability to accomplish God's plan. Thankfully God still claims us as his children. If we turn to him and follow his word, God will be there to see us through. God is there to help and guide us. If we use his words in the Bible as our map and we allow his gift of the Holy Spirit to be our guide, we will continue to sail on, for and with God's plans.

Can you think of a time or instance in your life that you were doing it on your own power, not with God's?

Can you think of a time or instance in your life that you did wait on God? That you used the Holy Spirit to help you move forward, to accomplish God's plan?

–Carolyn Pierce

READ: Acts 28

NOTES: _____

NEXT STEPS: _____

reflection

When Paul arrived in Malta, he was welcomed by the islanders. When Paul helped get a fire going, a snake came out of the wood and struck him. Based on what the islanders knew from their society, they believed the snake was a sign that Paul was a murderer, and the snake was giving him what he deserved. However, Paul did not fall ill or die because God had work for him to do. How often do we apply our own knowledge to a situation without consulting with the Holy Spirit for accurate wisdom? As word traveled about Paul and how he had healed people, they began to think differently about him. However, in Jerusalem, he hit a snag and was turned over to the Romans and arrested. Even after pleading his case, the Jews still wanted him killed. He called on a group of Jewish leaders who had not heard anything bad about him and knew of no reason he should have been arrested. They were curious about his message and asked him to share it. All they knew about Christians was bad. Sometimes we close our minds when someone wants to challenge our thinking. God protected Paul and over two years, he had a home to share the Gospel to everyone who came to visit him.

Have you ever wanted to share the Gospel but was afraid of what others would think? Try asking the Holy Spirit for courage and then go for it!

-Brenda Baker

CHALLENGE: DON'T WASTE YOUR DOWN TIME

Like anyone else, I love a good day off. You know, where you're able to kick your feet up and read a good book, take a nap, or do whatever it is you find fun and enjoyable. But inevitably I find that I waste a portion of that good day off. I'll get pulled down the rabbit hole of distraction and realize an hour (or more!) has passed. I usually grumble to myself about not being able to do what it was I wanted to do.

But what if, rather than grumbling about time wasted, we made a fundamental shift in how we view and prioritize our time? Let me propose a challenge to begin every day with a simple prayer:

God, I want to seek you first today. Open my eyes to see you in everything today. Open my ears to hear you speak in everything today. Open my heart to respond to you in everything today.

We know God will answer this prayer, and we will find God – all because we are approaching our days with an attitude and mindset of seeking God.

My hope is that this simple prayer will give us open eyes to see God in the normal and usual areas and activities of our lives while also revealing an entirely brand-new awareness of God. We will be changed and the lives around us will be changed as well.

–John Whirledge

notes

